

Norm Or Criterion

Education

Whether a result reports how a pupil compares or what they can do.

Norm-referenced

- Position within a reference group
- Standardised scores, percentiles, stanines
- Distribution roughly fixed in advance
- Good for selection and ranking
- Cannot show whether everyone improved

Criterion-referenced

- Performance against a stated standard
- Driving tests, swimming badges, mastery checks
- Everyone can pass, or nobody
- Good for certifying competence
- Depends entirely on where the line is set

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Most national systems are hybrids: criterion-referenced in description, norm-referenced in how boundaries are actually

Educational reference. A rising pass rate under norm-referencing is arithmetically impossible, which is worth remembering during results